UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/ICEF/1993/6
16 February 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
1993 session

FOR INFORMATION

PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT IN THE WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA REGION

The present document reports on and analyses major new trends and developments of UNICEF programme cooperation in the West and Central Africa region during 1992.

The UNICEF regional office has responsibility for UNICEF cooperation in the following countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and Zaire.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The process of democratization continued unabated throughout the region, albeit often in an atmosphere of turbulence and tension. The transfer to civilian rule in Nigeria was postponed by several months. Results of the presidential election in the Central African Republic were declared null and void. Cameroon, Chad, the Congo, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger, Senegal and Togo were at times shaken by severe social and political unrest. On a more positive note, free and relatively fair democratic presidential elections in Ghana and Mauritania returned the incumbents to power.

2. Despite the Yamoussoukro Summits, peace seems to elude Liberia for the time being. In October, the forces that control large areas of the country launched an attack on the forces of the Monitoring and Observer Group of the Economic Community of West African States in Monrovia, resulting in thousands of casualties as well as a new influx of displaced persons arriving in the capital. Along with other United Nations personnel, most UNICEF employees were temporarily evacuated to Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, leaving a few essential staff to assist with the new emergency. Neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone, already overburdened by a large population of refugees and displaced persons, saw their numbers swell as a result of the new fighting. In Sierra Leone, border area hostilities continued to aggravate an already difficult situation. A special subregional appeal was launched to respond to the increased needs of women and children.

3. The region's economic decline continued, with population growth still outstripping modest economic gains. For almost all the countries in the region, 1992 has been a year of moderate or no economic growth - even negative growth in a few instances. Governments' efforts to cope with the requirements of structural adjustment, continuing unfavourable export prices, domestic political unrest and effects of the debt burden have stymied national economies and imposed new levels of hardship on the poor. The forgiveness or rescheduling of some external debts other than those from international financial institutions, which are never forgiven or rescheduled, have relieved the repayment burden for some countries, but have not resulted in a net infusion of resources for their hard-pressed economies.

4. For Africa, the most important post-Summit event of the year was the International Conference on Assistance to African Children (ICAAC), sponsored by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), held in Dakar, Senegal, in November 1992. The conference adopted the "Consensus of Dakar", outlining commitments of African countries and donors to children. Delegates agreed to a series of mid-decade health goals and recommended the establishment of a continental follow-up mechanism under the auspices of OAU to monitor formulation and implementation of national programmes of action, which can now be expected to integrate these goals. Donor partners and international financial institutions committed themselves to making efforts to expand official development assistance, in particular to the social sector, and to promote debt cancellation to benefit children.

5. Cooperation between UNICEF and the African Development Bank (AfDB) was taken a step further with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding by the

Executive Director and the AfDB President. The Memorandum of Understanding proposes a series of working modalities between the two institutions, including a cost-sharing arrangement for project cooperation.

I. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS

6. The Bamako Initiative, a strategy strongly endorsed by the Board, is now almost universally adopted as the key health strategy throughout the region and is being widely implemented, with several countries such as Benin and Guinea going to scale. The World Bank, in its health policy document "Better Health for Africa", has also adopted the Bamako Initiative as the main health strategy. At a regional health review held in Abidjan in September 1992, UNICEF country offices in Cameroon, the Congo and Equatorial Guinea committed themselves to promoting implementation of the Bamako Initiative on a national scale. Several countries, including Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria and Togo, have begun successfully to implement the Bamako Initiative strategy in specific regions. Others, such as Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, have adopted the Bamako Initiative in their national health policies and are starting in selected districts.

7. Countries that are revitalizing their health systems in the context of the Bamako Initiative such as Benin and Guinea, or those with well-developed health systems such as Cape Verde and the Gambia, were able to sustain or attain even higher vaccination coverage. However, most countries experienced a drop in coverage during 1992. In some of the high coverage countries, efforts are under way to develop or strengthen epidemiological surveillance systems in order to facilitate monitoring of impact.

8. Concerning other child survival and development interventions such as diarrhoea prevention and case management, and the control of acute respiratory infections (ARI) and malaria - the main killer diseases in the region - coverage remains low, although access is around 50 per cent in many countries, especially in Bamako Initiative areas. In order to facilitate a more systematic approach, UNICEF and World Health Organization (WHO) regional directors have agreed to replace the various joint technical groups by a single joint technical group on the reinforcement of women's health and child survival in order to analyse key obstacles to improving effective coverage of these interventions and to facilitate concerted and corrective actions.

9. With the worsening situation of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) in the region, most UNICEF-assisted programmes have now integrated AIDS and sexually transmitted disease (STD) components. Informal networking has begun between STD/AIDS coordinators, WHO and UNICEF staff in several countries, as well as with the World Bank, the Organization for Coordination and Cooperation in the Control of Major Endemic Diseases in West Africa, Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere, Inc. (CARE), and bilateral donors. In order to strengthen reproductive health activities in the region, a careful selection of cost-effective intervention packages is required, with integration into the Bamako Initiative as well as the development of an effective interfacing with households in the spirit of women's empowerment. This year saw a testing of a newly developed safe motherhood training package, launched at an interregional workshop held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Furthermore, a French-speaking

safe motherhood network, created with World Bank support, has provided an entry point for overall strengthening of women's health interventions.

10. The lack of quantified nutrition goals in most NPAs and the strong food bias in nutrition strategies in many countries brought out the need for closer coordination between UNICEF, WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). In the context of the Joint African Task Force on Food and Nutrition, collaboration with FAO and WHO on common nutrition strategies is being gradually strengthened. Existing nutrition surveillance systems are being reoriented towards enhancing problem-solving capacity at district, community and household levels. The positive evaluation of the community-based nutrition programme in Segou, Mali, and the health and nutrition review in the Niger confirm the appropriateness of this strategic shift.

11. Progress in combating vitamin A deficiency is complicated by the lack of field trials, demonstrating the limited impact of routine supplementation with vitamin A on infant mortality reduction in the specific context of the region, which is prone to a high incidence of infections. Progress in eliminating iodine deficiency is hampered by logistical problems of iodizing and distributing salt as well as the high cost of iodine water dissolvers, capsules and injections.

12. Following positive experiences in Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, 14 countries in the region have taken up the "baby-friendly" hospital initiative with the objective of reaching at least 100 hospitals and maternity centres by the end of 1992. The goal is to have each and every hospital become baby-friendly by 1995. The importance of this effort is underscored by the fact that exclusive breast-feeding during the first six months is rather rare in the region, necessitating a major educational effort in order to ensure that the positive impact of exclusive breast-feeding on diarrhoea-related mortality is not lost. The approach of the West and Central Africa region emphasizes microplanning and monitoring of implementation at the hospital level and takes into consideration the programmatic implications of going-to-scale.

13. Most of the dracunculiasis (guinea-worm disease) endemic countries have developed national plans of action for its eradication. Whereas Cameroon is already close to achieving virtual elimination, Benin and Ghana are showing sharp reductions in prevalence. Regional capacity for dracunculiasis surveillance and mapping is improving rapidly with assistance from EPICENTRE and the guinea-worm eradication support team, outposted to Burkina Faso.

14. The education sector is receiving more emphasis in UNICEF-assisted programmes in the region, with primary support being renewed in early childhood, formal and non-formal basic education. However, progress on this issue is often hampered by the lack of a clear government policy in education, which could help to determine the kind of society that would be the most beneficial to the nation. At a regional meeting of representatives in Abidjan in September 1992, a workshop on education was led by the UNICEF education cluster on the theme "Decolonizing African Education". UNICEF capacities in education were further enhanced by a workshop on early childhood development and education analysis. A pressing need remains for UNICEF to identify and

attract professional staff in this field, in particular African nationals, to lead this process within the organization.

15. A regional consultation on participatory development, bringing together UNICEF staff, government counterparts and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), made recommendations for participatory approaches pertinent to reaching the decade goals in the region. In the spirit of technical cooperation among developing countries, resource persons from three continents shared views and experiences directly benefiting country offices in the region. In November 1992, UNICEF organized jointly with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, AfDB and the Government of Côte d'Ivoire a seminar on the cultural dimension of development, focusing, inter alia, on the role of communities and the cultural approach to development.

16. With most Governments now acknowledging the problems surrounding children in especially difficult circumstances (CEDC), the regional office has begun to strengthen support to country offices in situation analysis, programme development, training and advocacy of child rights. It is in this vein that it is proposed to create in 1994 the post of regional adviser, CEDC, offset by the abolition of the post of regional adviser, community development. A close collaboration was established with the Americas and Caribbean Regional Office, benefiting from a mission of the former CEDC adviser, who assisted the regional office in developing a CEDC programme for the region. Several UNICEF offices, including Benin, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo, have commissioned CEDC studies, working closely with government and NGO counterparts in this effort. Burkina Faso elaborated an extension of its CEDC programme during the proposed 1993-1994 bridging programme. The regional office collaborated closely with the International Labour Organisation during a subregional seminar on working children held in Dakar. The growing number of AIDS orphans in several countries urgently requires an analysis of the situation and programmatic interventions.

17. Cognizant of the urgency to improve the condition of women in the region, UNICEF offices increasingly target women as beneficiaries in health and education and are working more closely with Governments in the application of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Situation analyses now routinely disaggregate data by gender, highlighting the specific needs of women. A training workshop on gender analysis, to be held later in 1993 in the region, as well as a regional programme establishing programme and advocacy strategies, are expected to contribute to improving the quality of the situation analysis and programming for women. Particular and urgent attention needs to be given to the discriminatory position of the girl child. This theme was pursued at a recent symposium held in Nouakchott, Mauritania, in collaboration with the Maghreb Arab Union.

II. EXTERNAL RELATIONS

18. Social mobilization programmes show improved effectiveness as they move away from short-lived vertical campaigns to long-term integrated support to country programmes in an effort to bring about broader participation by the communities themselves and more lasting behaviour changes. The West and

Central Africa country programme recommendations of the Central African Republic, Mali and Mauritania, being submitted to the 1993 Executive Board session, show that this approach was followed consistently. Valuable lessons were learned from social mobilization evaluations in Burkina Faso and Ghana. While showing significant contributions made to universal child immunization, results showed the need to more fully involve all partners in the process, in particular NGOs and the private sector.

19. With most countries in the region having ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the challenge now lies in its implementation. Contacts have been established with parliamentarians in countries drafting new constitutions or reviewing clauses in existing legislation. Furthermore, UNICEF is supporting a regional comparative study on child legislation and the requirements of the Convention. In order to promote girls' education, two television spots were developed with UNESCO.

20. With the spread of AIDS taking on alarming proportions, the regional office undertook a review of available behavioural research as a first step in developing a communication strategy targeted to adolescent and pre-adolescent girls. The review revealed the limited number of studies done in the region, pointing to the need for qualitative research on behavioural issues by selected field offices.

21. In the spirit of national capacity-building and mobilizing strategic alliances in the region, collaboration with the Pan-African Radio and Television Association is being strengthened, involving the co-production of documentary films on priority themes in the three regions of Africa, as well as the training of television producers. This is in addition to a major programme to train rural radio producers, implemented with FAO. The well-known Malian film-maker, Cheik Oumar Sissoko, was commissioned to produce a special video on community development, which was shown at ICAAC.

22. In order to support country offices in their fund-raising efforts, programme information country kits were produced for Côte d'Ivoire, the Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria. In its search to identify a number of countries in the region with domestic fund-raising potential, Greeting Card and related operations has targeted Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Nigeria and Senegal for private sector fund-raising initiatives.

III. OPERATIONAL AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

23. In a climate of political instability, security remains an issue of major concern. At least 10 offices have made use of various phases of the United Nations emergency plan during the year. One local staff member was killed in N'Djamena, Chad. The great majority of United Nations staff in Monrovia were temporarily evacuated to Abidjan, leaving only the most essential staff to deal with the new crisis. This emergency has highlighted the urgent need to improve regional capacity to communicate with and among country offices, given the poor state of telecommunications in the region. In order to cope better within the crisis environment, a regional strategy to adjust operational mechanisms is under serious consideration. A workshop on emergencies strengthened capacities of UNICEF staff in country offices.

24. Increased attention is given to office structures as they relate to country programming. In this spirit, the Budget Planning and Review Committee exercise ran parallel with the final review of country programme recommendations for the 1993 session of the Board. A workshop on the "country programme management plan" was conducted before the budget exercise, enabling country offices to better link budget proposals to programme implementation needs.

25. Regional workshops were held in the areas of education, administration/personnel, finance/budget and water supply and environmental sanitation. Other training events and meetings centred around health (health planning, AIDS, safe motherhood, planning for the baby-friendly hospital initiative), management information systems and programme communication.

26. With the recruitment of subregional coordinators for electronic data processing (EDP) based in Bamako (Mali), Dakar, Kinshasa (Zaire), Lagos (Nigeria), and Ouagadougou, respectively, the region's management information systems network has begun to assist country offices in computer systems development, computer training, hardware maintenance and upgrading. Furthermore, country offices are expanding their own base of systems expertise with the designation of EDP focal points. A major objective is hardware and software standardization, which is expected to result in considerable cost savings.